

# Jacob Prepares to Meet Esau

Genesis 32:1-21

Jacob has left the hardship of Mesopotamia and life under the manipulative treatment of his father-in-law Laban

With his family and all his possessions in tow, Jacob is now a short distance from his homeland

20 years earlier, he fled in fear for his life having deceived his father with the help of his mother and stole the birthright blessing from his brother Esau

Esau was so enraged that he was breathing murderous threats against Jacob, so Jacob ran away, and now, he is on the virtual doorstep of returning home

Now we come to the other of the more familiar passages regarding the life of Jacob

The first being Jacob's ladder, where the heavens opened up...

In this ch. Jacob will wrestle with God and at the end of this wrestling match, he will have his name changed from Jacob to Israel

But before we get there, we have to get through the 1<sup>st</sup> two-thirds of the ch.

This ch. is divided into 3 distinct sections with vrs 1 serving as an introduction, 2-12, 13-21, and 22-32

## **J. Jacob prepares to meet Esau**

1 Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.

2 Jacob said when he saw them, “This is God’s camp.” So he named that place Mahanaim. MAY huh NAY im

3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

4 He also commanded them saying, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: ‘Thus says your servant Jacob, “I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now;

5 I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.” ’ ”

6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies;

8 for he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.”

9 Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,’

10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

11 “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children.

12 “For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’

Jacob the runaway must now confront his past with his family and his future with God, and it becomes very obvious, God isn't going to leave Jacob on his own

We begin with **1. Messengers of God**

1 Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.

This is immediately after Laban's departure

If you remember, when Jacob home left 20 years earlier, he was met with divine messengers, when the skies opened up...

That theophany was designed to prepare him for life in Paddan-Aram, and this theophany is designed to prepare him for his future with God, which also requires for him to confront his past with his family

There are several things in this verse that are important:

1) the angels are a sign of God's protective presence, His assurance that He is with him

2) the angels met him, he did not meet them, as always, God initiates the meeting

3) it is a reminder to worship, as Jacob promised he would when he returned to the land of his father

4) the way this is phrased in the Hebrew, it carries the tone of a threatening encounter, we aren't told what Jacob heard, but it may have been a stern word from God

This makes more sense...

2 Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim. MAY huh NAY im

The name Mahanaim means 'two camps' His camp and God's camp

God's camp, or camp of God, is also translated God's army

### **1 Chronicles 12:22 (NASB)**

For day by day men came to David to help him, until there was a great army like the army of God.

Jacob's perspective on what he saw was that the group of angels was so large, he considered it to be like God's army

Seeing a massive groups of angels was likely an intimidating scene, one that would cause us to be scared, like many biblical characters were when they encountered angels

## **2. Messengers from Jacob**

3 Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

One may infer that the visit from the angels encouraged Jacob to meet Esau, but we don't really know, that's purely speculative

The land of Seir is south of Canaan, so we don't know how long it took for the messengers to get to Esau, a full day

### **a. The message**

4 He also commanded them saying, "Thus

you shall say to my lord Esau: ‘Thus says your servant Jacob, “I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed until now;  
5 I have oxen and donkeys and flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight.” ’ ”

A couple of things to note here:  
Greeting Esau with ‘your servant Jacob’ is somewhat of a customary greeting in the ancient near east

That is followed by what is in the Hebrew a 6-word summary of the last 20 years of Jacob’s life

He leaves out the reason why he left, and it implies that Esau knows who Laban is and why he hasn’t heard from him sooner

Jacob doesn’t go into detail and doesn’t need to re-hash family history when the messengers meet Esau: Esau will be well aware

Vrs 5 provides a hint that a gift is available if needed, but it vastly underestimates Jacob’s true wealth

He also calls Esau ‘lord’ here, which indicates Jacob has a guilty conscience at

how he treated his brother and how he left home

### **b. The report**

6 The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

Upon returning to Jacob, the messengers inform him that Esau is already on his way to meet him

The phrasing in the Hebrew is intentionally Ambiguous and no detail is provided: is Esau coming joyfully or with bad intentions?

The mention of his coming with 400 men conveys the idea of bad news: over the last 20 years, Jacob has been accumulating flocks of animals, Esau has been accumulating men of battle

### **c. The response**

7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies;

Jacob is, of course, petrified, he fears the worst, perhaps forgetting that God has promised to be with Him, and is sure that

Esau is going to exact revenge

He devises a plan to divide his family and his flocks into 2 groups in order to salvage something in the event Esau comes to attack

8 for he said, “If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape.”

The chance that the remaining group could escape from 400 warriors is probably zero, but this is a plan that makes sense to Jacob and he is relying on his own wisdom

But next we find the beginning of a true change in Jacob’s life

#### **d. Jacob prays**

This is Jacob’s first recorded prayer and the only extended prayer in Genesis

It contains 4 parts:

##### **1) Invocation**

9 Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your relatives, and I will prosper you,’

The desperation of Jacob’s situation causes him to cry out to God

Jacob has not forgotten how God revealed Himself 20 years earlier at Bethel in his 1<sup>st</sup> theophany, when God said...

**Genesis 28:13a (NASB95)**

~~And behold, the LORD stood above it and said,~~ "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac;

Jacob is learning to depend upon God and not himself

**2) Confession**

10 I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies.

We can see spiritual transformation taking place in the life of Jacob

He recognizes his unworthiness before God and that he is entitled to absolutely nothing

Lovingkindness relates to a superior, who out of kind character meets the need of another who cannot help himself

Faithfulness signifies that although the superior has no obligation to meet the need, the superior can always be counted on

This always describes God, and Jacob recognizes what God has done for him

Jacob submits himself as God's servant, an accolade reserved for Moses, David, Josua, Caleb and Isaiah's anonymous servant

When he left home 20 years earlier, all he had was his staff, what a shepherd would carry, and now, he has become 2 companies, large enough to divide his family and possessions into 2 separate camps

### **3) Petition**

11 "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children.

Deliver me, or save me, from the hand of Esau, for he is firmly in his grasp

From Jacob's perspective, he is as good as dead in the hand of Esau, and there is nothing he can do about it, and it will take the work of God to save him

This sounds so much like many of the psalms we read when David is facing imminent death and calls upon the Lord to rescue him from his enemies

#### 4) Faith

12 “For You said, ‘I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.’ Against the insurmountable odds that Jacob faces, he has faith in what God has said He stands on the promise that God has made

My descendants will be as numerous as the sand of the sea, how can that be so, if Esau comes and wipes my family out?

I trust in You, only you, my future in is Your hands

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> major section **3. Jacob’s gifts**

In an effort to appease Esau, in the event he has revenge on his mind, Jacob decides to send gifts

13 So he spent the night there. Then he selected from what he had with him a present for his brother Esau:

14 two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams,

15 thirty milking camels and their colts, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.

Quite an impressive list of animals, 550 in

total, and shows the great wealth Jacob accumulated during his final 6 years working for Laban and the enormous blessing of God upon his life

This would have been only a portion of what Jacob possessed

### **Jacob's instructions**

16 He delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, "Pass on before me, and put a space between droves."

17 He commanded the one in front, saying, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, saying, 'To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and to whom do these animals in front of you belong?'

18 then you shall say, 'These belong to your servant Jacob; it is a present sent to my lord Esau. And behold, he also is behind us.' "

19 Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him;

20 and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.' " For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me."

The plan is for Esau to receive wave after

wave of animals as gifts to show the love, remorse and good-will of Jacob towards his brother

The true goal of all of this is seen in vrs 20  
Where Jacob says  
'when he will accept me'

literally, when he will receive me, which means when he will forgive me

vrs 13 and vrs 20 emphasis this took place on the same night, which sets the stage for the most significant night of Jacob's life

Very soon, while the gifts are being dispatched, Jacob will wrestle with God

A lifetime's worth of lessons will be learned in a night's-long battle

Jacob will forever be changed, and he will be able to look back and reflect on all that God has done for him

And he can look forward to all that God will do in the fulfillment of the promises made to him